

6-1-1957

Your Heritage of Freedom

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches

Recommended Citation

Mansfield, Mike 1903-2001, "Your Heritage of Freedom" (1957). *Mike Mansfield Speeches*. 237.
https://scholarworks.umt.edu/mansfield_speeches/237

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Mike Mansfield Papers at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mike Mansfield Speeches by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

FILE COPY

YOUR HERITAGE OF FREEDOM

Address of Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana
Commencement Exercises, Clarke College, Dubuque, Iowa
3:00 P.M., Saturday, June 1, 1957

It is customary on occasions such as this for the speaker to begin his remarks with some light-hearted comment. He might refer, for example, to the fact that his wife had been on this campus as a young student several years ago! Or he might comment on his own days in college.

Usually by the time such comments have been exhausted, the commencement address is far enough along so that the more restless graduates -- or their parents -- are looking for the nearest exit. Thereafter, those portions of the address which the speaker is likely to think are the most important may not receive much attention.

I propose to reverse that procedure today and plunge immediately into my subject. I may make some assertions without proof of their validity. But bear with me for twenty minutes and I will try to tie these remarks into a bundle you may carry with you for the next few years. There may even be some time left to tell you what a fine looking group of graduates you are.

Your Place in History

There are two periods in the life of man (and I use the word "man" in its generic sense) when he is likely to contemplate his place in history.

First, he is expected to think of his potential contribution to history when he graduates from college.

Second, he is likely to think of his contribution to history when he begins to think of death.

Most of the rest of the time, however, man is so occupied with living -- he is so close to the stirring event of life itself -- that he is usually not able to assess his impact on history.

I was once a school teacher. During those years, I discovered that the time to teach a student something was when he was paying attention. I believe you are attentive today because this is one of the moments in your personal life history when you are ready to learn and to plan.

There is one simple thought that I want to leave with you. It is this:

Every man and woman has an opportunity to leave his or her mark on the history of the human race.

The Pyramid of Life

If we could somehow visualize the history of mankind as a total, it might look something like a pyramid -- perhaps a pyramid of people -- or of ideas -- piled one on the other.

The essential of any pyramid which can be built to its apex is that it rest on a sound foundation.

The foundation for this pyramid of life is that it rests on man's belief in God. It is by that belief that man knows his contributions will not be lost for any divine reason. He knows the foundation will not fail. If man's contribution is to be lost, it will be because of man's failure, not God's failure.

A second essential of a pyramid is that each stone rest firmly on another. Lives and ideas must be fitted together so that each succeeding level of construction rests firmly on the foundation beneath it.

Your place in this pyramid is yet to be determined. Determine it well for I assure you that one day you will be called upon to tell what you have contributed to mankind. When you are ready to pass from this life, you must ask yourself: What have I contributed?

You have heard the story of the rich and favored King who asked a wise Athenian whether he considered the King lucky. The answer was quick: "How can I tell? You aren't dead yet."

And this is, I suppose, a characteristic of the contributions we make. Their total impact may not be known until we have passed on.

I have been told that one point impressed on men when they are learning to fly is that they owe their lives to the men who went before them. The pilot who first flew into a cloud and crashed because he could not maintain his equilibrium must not have felt that he was making a contribution to life. But lives sacrificed in all lines of endeavor have contributed to man's knowledge and growth and have helped to build the pyramid towards its apex.

All that man is able to do today he owes to what others have done before him. What man will be able to do tomorrow, he will owe to those of us who live today.

What Can You Do?

But what can you do? You are but one of billions of people on this earth.

One thing is clear. You can do worse than nothing. You can live a life that destroys rather than builds. You have the potential of becoming a

burden on your community. You can force others to take care of you in the county jail or elsewhere. You can be a source of destructive acts in your community and not contribute to the growth of mankind. In short, you can act in such a way as to sap the resources of your community and require others to devote extra energy to your protection, rather than to be able to devote themselves to the growth of man.

But at the opposite end of the scale from doing nothing or worse than nothing, it is also clear to me that you have the potential -- as an individual -- of contributing to the advance of mankind.

One of our great contemporary authors has written: "Nothing was ever created by two men. There are no good collaborations, whether in music, in art, in poetry, in mathematics, in philosophy. Once the miracle of creation has taken place, the group can build and extend it, but the group never invents anything. The preciousness lies in the lonely mind of man.

The preciousness of our religion and our government lies in their ability to preserve and to promote the capability of every individual to make his unique contribution to the progress of mankind.

None of us can know the contribution he may make toward man's progress. Some may develop new ideas; others will improve our physical surroundings; some will influence the lives of their companions; others will pass their heritage on to children capable of greater contributions than their parents. We each have the capacity to leave the world a better place than it was before we arrived in it.

Man as an individual has laboriously struggled upward. He understands things today he did not understand last year or the year before. He moves ahead step by step. He can continue this progress when his spirit and mind can operate in freedom. His growth will be stunted if his freedom is impaired.

It is for this reason that it is so important that we as individuals and as a sovereign entity shape our destiny toward protecting and promoting the freedom of this nation.

You young women gathered here today to take an important step in life are the offspring of a free people. You are here to carry on the heritage that has been built. You are each fitting yourselves to make your unique contributions to the progress of mankind.

I have now completed what are the more serious portion of my remarks. The time has come to stop talking philosophy and to talk practicalities. You have jobs ahead of you. You have a community and a world in which you must live.

The World You Face

What is this world you face? Is it likely to be a peaceful world?

Last year I delivered an address to the graduating students of Montana State University. I told them that for the first time in my experience I could state my belief that a world war in their lifetime might be avoided. I said that I believed this was possible because of things done by men and women from many nations.

I reminded them of the discovery of atomic power -- a discovery which was a threat and still is -- but which may also be a benefit in disguise because any nation which might start a war may now reasonably expect to bring about its own destruction. Nations of the world have realized in the past two years that another war might destroy all life. We live at peace as the result of what Sir Winston Churchill has described as the mutual terror resulting from the threat of atomic destruction.

Two years ago, at the Summit Conference, the United States and the Soviet Union crystallized an unspoken and unwritten understanding. The understanding was that neither country on pain of self-destruction could start a major war or permit a situation between other powers to deteriorate to the point where a major war might threaten.

Today if we get into a world war, it is not likely to be because the great powers want war, but because they will have slipped into war inadvertently.

Recall, for a moment, the most serious situation of last fall, the situations in the Middle East. Israeli troops had moved on Suez. France and Great Britain brought force to bear in the same area. The situation was fraught with danger that a small war might become a big war.

I cannot go into the details of those historic months. But I call your attention to the fact that the world stood virtually united in demanding that the use of force cease. The United States and the Soviet Union -- with no understanding between them -- found themselves on the same side. Together -- unwillingly together -- they worked through the United Nations to snuff out the fire of military action in the tinder box of the Middle East.

I do not attribute the stopping of hostilities in the Middle Eastern crisis to any great diplomatic finesse on the part of the United States, the Soviet Union, or any other nation. I attribute it to the overriding, but unspoken, threat posed by the existence of weapons of mutual terror. These weapons might inadvertently have been unleashed had the use of force in the Middle East continued unrestrained.

A New Summit Meeting?

It has been two years since the President met at Geneva with the Chiefs of State of France, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. It may well be that the time is approaching for another such meeting.

Much has happened in these two years which might shape the thinking of such a meeting. Britain has a new Prime Minister. President Eisenhower has been reelected by the greatest majority of any President. The leaders in the Soviet Union have faced the crisis of rebellion in the satellite nations. The Middle East crisis has warned us all that war lurks around the corner for nations not ever mindful of the terrible consequences that might flow from relatively isolated military action.

It seems to me that the people of the earth have the right to expect that the chiefs of state of these great powers should gather at least once every two years to discuss the issue of war or peace.

I believe that another Summit Conference will soon be due, and I suggest a new technique for such a conference. Past conferences of this kind have been followed by disillusionment and disappointment, I believe partly because they tried to do too much.

Would it not be advisable then in devising an agenda for such a conference to limit it to one important problem? Could the nations not agree, for example, to consider only one question on which agreement might be expected?

One of the difficulties in past conferences of this type has been that the agenda has been as wide open as the problems that face the great powers. Such an agenda tends to concentrate discussions on all the problem areas on which we disagree.

Why could not the Chiefs of State take up just one problem -- a big one I must admit -- but one upon which there is some chance of agreement?

Limit Hydrogren Bomb Tests

I have felt for some time now that real progress might be made toward agreement for the suspension of testing of hydrogen bombs of great size.

This should not be a suspension of tests on our part only. I propose instead that we endeavor to reach agreement with the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom on suspending tests of bombs over a certain strength level.

An agreement of this kind would be self-enforcing. We know from reading the daily press that our detection devices as well as those of many other countries can infallibly detect hydrogen test explosions when they exceed a certain size. It follows therefore that if any party to an agreement not to test the biggest bombs were to violate that agreement, the violation would instantly be known to the entire world.

I grant that such an agreement would not be without its dangers. But I believe that the time has come when the dangers of further uncontrolled big tests outweigh the dangers of agreement to suspend such tests. Surely this is an important enough issue for the Heads of State to explore together ways of agreeing to limit or stop altogether the testing of hydrogen bombs so large that their fallout of radioactive material poses a threat to mankind.

Leadership

It is a strange thing that the United States which has been the leading nation in the development of military uses of the atom has somehow failed to occupy a leadership position in the development of the peaceful uses of the atom. It is a strange thing that this nation has somehow failed to convince much of the world that we are in the forefront in seeking to control the devastating effects of the atom and to put it to peaceful uses.

The time has now come for a vigorous and vital effort, led by the President of the United States, to begin to roll back the dangers of atomic warfare.

The President cannot exert this leadership by occasionally authorizing his press secretary, Mr. Jim Hagerty, no matter how competent, to respond to pronouncements by Bulganin or Khrushchev. Neither can Mr. Dulles counter the propaganda moves of the Soviet Union by authorizing his press secretary, Mr. Lincoln White, to answer Mr. Gromyko. The voice of our leaders must be heard, not the voice of their press secretaries.

Moreover, leadership can never be exerted by waiting for the other side to make a statement to which this nation can then respond.

An essential element of leadership on the part of a man or a nation is willingness to take the initiative, to move out ahead. Leadership requires imagination and boldness and coolly calculated assessment of alternatives in any course of action.

Leadership is not based on big talk, big size, or big emotion. I am sure that you have had experience enough to know that some men are assumed to be leaders, just because they are big, strong, and have a powerful voice. But you also know that real leadership among men or nations is not based on appearances, but rather is based on performance. Acts speak louder than words, as the saying goes.

There has been a tendency in the past few years for this nation to rely on words instead of deeds. This situation is illustrated by recent hearings which were held in the Senate on the annual appropriation for the U. S. Information Agency, one operating part of which is the Voice of America. After sitting through some days of hearings when witnesses testified as to the need for additional funds to carry the story of America abroad, I had the impression that much of this agency operates under the philosophy that if we can just manage to shout louder than anyone else that we are good and they are bad, we will establish freedom and democracy throughout the world and Communism will be defeated.

Leadership depends not only upon what we say, but upon what we do. Reverting to my opening remarks, the pyramid of your life -- the pyramid of your nation -- can not rest on words alone. It must rest on solid ideas

and acts.

One of the reasons I have commented on what has seemed to me to be a deterioration in our leadership in the world in the past few years is the fact that our future as a nation is molded by the present and past, just as your futures as citizens are molded by the present and the past. Your world of the past four years has been Clarke College in the heart of the mid-west. You will carry the impressions of these years, of your teachers, of this campus, of your fellow students throughout your life.

The same is true of our nation. It's future is being molded by the acts of today. Our acts of today are establishing the United States as a great leader, or as a great failure. Nations rise and fall. The past is studded with the relics of empires which were unable to adapt themselves to the new. It is studded with the relics of nations that lived in the glory of past victories and were never able to face and to deal with the problems of the present.

Can we look at our nation today and know that we are willing to face the issues? Are we able to look a fact in the face and recognize it as a fact? Or do we look at facts and call them fancies because we aren't willing to face them? Do we see the Russians as they are, or as we would like to think them to be? Do we recognize the threat of hydrogen weapons, or do we hide from it? Do you read the comic section of your newspaper because you are unwilling to face the hard issues of the editorial page? Do you say, "Let those in Washington worry about that one -- they're the experts?"

In asking these questions, I have intentionally mixed together those we should ask as a nation with those we should ask as individuals because what we are as a group of individuals, we are as a nation. If we as individuals adopt an attitude of "let George do it," if we as individuals are unwilling to face facts, be honest, and do the best we can with what we've got, then we as a nation cannot expect to exercise the leadership essential to the creation and maintenance of a world in which freedom shall not perish.

My friends and fellow Americans here at Clarke College, it has been a deep pleasure for me to be with you today. I find I do have time to tell you that you are a fine looking group of graduates. Indeed, I would have liked to have taught at this college myself twenty-five years ago. Or if not, I would certainly have been privileged to be a student at a nearby college!

I know that the United States in the hands of such charm/as is
and ability
gathered here today will not fail to make its contribution to history.